

# Dairy Farmers Are Business People

**TOWSON, Md.** — He's put in a 15-hour work day but is still sitting in front of his home computer entering data and working on budgets.

This isn't a description of a corporate, ladder-climbing executive, but of today's dairy farmer — a shrewd businessman, responsible for the workings of a large, high-tech operation.

While a Norman Rockwell painting of a farmer in overalls sitting on his milking stool at ol' Bessie's side is probably etched in the minds of many Americans, the reality of a dairy farmer is a far cry away.

On Lyle Tjossas' 250-acre dairy farm in Kasson, Minn., advancements in genetics play a role in improving the quality of milk his cows produce.

A lifelong dairy farmer and member of the dairy organization, 21st Century Genetics, Tjossas has been breeding his cows for the last several years to try to produce milk with a higher protein and a lower fat content.

"People don't realize the technology you have to keep up on to do that," said Tjossas. "There was a time when you milked the cows twice a day, fed them and that was about it. But today, if you want to be successful at it, there's a lot of things you have to do to achieve that goal."

## Computers Play Key Role

On Dave Hardie's 720-acre farm in Lansing, N.Y., keeping track of his herd of 500 dairy cows is made easier with the assistance of computers.

The three computers on his farm improve efficiency by being used for everything from bookkeeping to feeding the cows.

Data on each cow on Hardie's farm is entered into the computer, including medical information, how much milk the cow produces and the type and amount of feed the cow receives.

"This helps us with ration balancing," said Hardie. "The computer printouts help us determine when we need to strengthen the feed or make other adjustments."

Likewise, computers play a major role on Hugh Weathers' 2,300-acre farm in Bowman, S.C., where computers assist with determining the "herd performance" of his 700 milking cows.

"Computers help us assess the relative performance of each cow to the other," Weathers said. "This aids us in our decisions as to the profitability of each animal — not just how the 700 cows are doing as a group, but as 700 individual cows. We watch them as individual units of production."

## Milk Production Up

Research and experimentation has resulted in improved methods of selection, breeding and feeding of cows. Probably the most significant change in the past 150 years of American dairy farming is the dramatic increase in milk production. Today, farms can produce much more milk with fewer cows.

For example, milk production per cow 150 years ago was estimated at 375 gallons annually; today the average has climbed to more than 1,650 gallons per cow. In 1991, almost 10 billion cows produced 148 billion pounds of milk.

"The biggest, most constant change in dairy farming is nutrition — the flexibility we have in our feeding," said Hardie. "The difference in nutrition can increase production in cows, and that's the name of the game. This efficiency adds to a farmer's bottom line."

## Sharing Expertise

Another way to improve the bottom line is to get help from the experts. An emerging advancement in farm management is to use outside consultants — another example of how dairy farms today mirror typical American businesses.

"The farmer who takes a more business-like approach to farming recognizes that he needs to have an objective point of view available to

him," said Weathers. "Right now, for example, we'll be needing a renovation of our milking parlor. I'm going to hire experts to tell me the pros and cons of various alternatives and try to weigh that advice. We did that a few years ago when we built a new freestall barn."

Weathers, Tjossas and Hardie learn about the newest technologies, the latest advancements in farm management and the most recent findings in animal research by studying the overwhelming amount of information that's available. They read the trade journals, subscribe to university newsletters and attend seminars.

Like most executives, many dairy farmers today have offices with fax machines and multiple-line phone systems.

Another way Hardie keeps up with all the latest advancements is through his involvement with Cayuga Marketing, a subgroup of the DairyLea Cooperative. This is a group of about 25 of the highest producing, most progressive farmers in the area. While competitive like any other corporate executives sharing similar jobs, they also share the latest in new farming technologies to improve milk production.

"It's a different ballgame today," said Hardie. "This is a family farm, but you get tremendous changes when you increase size, acquire more machinery, and so on."

**Family Farms Remain**  
Despite the technological advancements taking place throughout the dairy industry, some things do stay the same.

Many of today's 150,000 dairy farms are still family businesses, run by lifelong dairy farmers who are committed to producing the high quality dairy products Americans have come to enjoy.

Lyle Tjossas grew up on a farm and his son now works with him. Dave Hardie has been a dairyman since 1951 and is a partner with his son. Hugh Weathers' family farm goes back to his grandfather who started farming in 1927. His father remains active in the farm that Weathers and his brother operate.

While better management and science are keys to today's dairy farm success, it is the commitment by today's dairy farmer — 24 hours a day, 365 days a year — to provide Americans with good-tasting, high quality milk and dairy foods that keeps the industry going strong.

Although each has his own employees, Tjossas, Hardie and Weathers need to put in a lot of time on their farms. However, they have numerous other professional responsibilities as well, including serving on the board of directors for United Dairy Industry Association.

This June Dairy Month, the American Dairy Association salutes these businessmen — our nation's dairy farmers — for all of their hard work and long hours to bring us an abundant supply of delicious dairy foods.



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